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ABSTRACT

Too often inadequate preparation in facilitating an outdoor experience is the rule and the subsequent group experience suffers. In an organization like Outward Bound where areas are used repeatedly, an evolutionary form of reconnaissance is often adequate. However, for school groups, this form of reconnaissance is not practical since too few of them use a site on a regular basis. A high level physical reconnaissance is not necessary for a school experience due to limitations in leader experience, actual time in the field, and equipment. Yet, the information needed and the lead time required for a well planned school sponsored excursion is considerable. Therefore, a school planner might consider a team approach, using several teachers and/or students as a reconnaissance team to accomplish a number of tasks. This group reconnaissance idea offers the farsighted innovator much more of a chance to bring about institutional change. Outward Bound tried a group reconnaissance in April 1975 with four youth leaders from Denver. These individuals were involved in an advanced reconnaissance, a total group preplanning meeting, a 4-day reconnaissance at Pawnee National Grasslands, a debriefing and future planning session, a resource guide development meeting, and a resource guide draft meeting. Included are copies of the preparation responsibilities list, tentative resources guide outline, and the project center program planning sheet. (Author/NQ)

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TEAM RECONNAISSANCE: A Process for Involving Teachers in the Preplanning of Experiential Education Projects

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Colorado OUTWARD BOUND School
May, 1975

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A leader is best
When people barely know that he exists
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worst when they despise him.
Fail to honor people,
They fail to honor you.
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will all say,
"We did this ourselves."

Lao Tsu

Field sites for away from school activities need to be well checked out prior to use by a group. This reconnaissance responsibility usually falls to the group leader. A variety of methods have been used to gain enough information to facilitate an outdoor experience ranging from a glance at a map to a full scale prior survey on location. Too often inadequate preparation is the rule and the subsequent group experience suffers. People in need of doing reconnaisance often short change themselves on time and leave the real reconnaissance to the actual experience when it is often too late.

In an organization like OUTWARD BOUND where areas are used repeatedly, an evolutionary form of reconnaissance is often quite adequate. Year after year groups use a location and reports build up filling out the resource picture giving following groups a representative image of the area's potential for OUTWARD BOUND activities. For school groups this form of reconnaissance is impractical. Too few groups use a site on a regular basis and generally the information requirements of an area are more complex than those for OUTWARD BOUND. The physical lay of the land is the primary information need of an OUTWARD BOUND planner. Much of this data can be gained through topographic maps supplemented by past experiences of previous leaders who can offer guidelines on specific program areas such as rock climbing sites, peaks, solo areas, expedition routes, mountain passes, and river crossings. This kind of physical information is potentially important for a school planner too, depending on the level of experience he or she is going to facilitate. (See attached planning form for the COB Project Center) For the most part, however, the high level OB physical reconnaissance needs will not be necessary for a school experience due to limitations in leader experience, actual time in the field, and equipment.

What can be potentially a much higher reconnaissance need is information on the texture of the physical setting. What kinds of ecosystems will the group encounter? How receptive are the local people to a school group coming in? What about the history, wildlife and land planning for this region? If the group is using an interdisciplinary approach the leader needs to be aware of the subject areas which could be integrated into the experience so that pre-trip activities in the classroom can be planned. A physical walk-through is therefore only one aspect of a full reconnaissance for a school group.

The information needed for a well planned school sponsored excursion is considerable. The lead time required is also great. Faced with these kinds of obstacles in planning an activity a school planner might consider a team approach. Using several teachers and/or students as a reconnaissance team accomplishes a number of tasks. First, the varied information needed for the activity is more quickly gathered by a group who has divided up responsibilities than by a single person. Second, by involving a broad base of people in pre-planning more of their involvement in the activity is likely. If people feel they have a part in the creative aspect of the trip, they will be more enthusiastic about its implementation. Third, the actual creative use of the activity is enhanced by adding a variety of perspectives from a variety of people. Fourth, the activity is initiated on much firmer ground institutionally if more than a few people take part in the actual reconnaissance. A group of people can better answer the inevitable questions that arise about the need for such an away from school experience and how this experience can tie into the ongoing curriculum.

For a school planning a series of away from school activities over a semester or school year careful thought should be given to doing a thorough reconnaissance. It is not inadvisable to plan doing reconnaissance a full school year in advance of setting up an experience oriented unit. This time can be creatively used not only in developing academic tie ins, logistical planning, physical scouting of the sites but in building an experience based foundation of support among faculty and students who will be directly and indirectly involved in the unit. In using this kind of approach a leader is building an experiential process for developing experience based programs. The Experiential method works well in planning phases as well as in the operational portion.

Most educational planners sidestep using this approach because it takes more planning time and there aren't immediate rewards. It is more time consuming to mobilize a group of teachers around a theme rather than develop your own idea by yourself. There also is the need for negotiation and give and take. This is tough on the expanded egos of educational innovators. Reward in the form of student feedback is deferred. A whole year before we get kids out the classroom? Right. I offer this curt reply because of questions that the hyper-innovators can't answer easily, namely: What happens when you wear out, who will pick up the project? What kind of support will surface when the project faces tough times?, i.e. financial distress, transportation problems, scheduling hassles, a student gets hurt? What does your family think about the extra time you are spending at school?

The group reconnaissance idea and the overall group preplanning model is not a panacea. It does, however, offer the farsighted innovator much more of a chance to bring about institutional change. (change which lasts over time) He or she must be willing to defer reward because of longer planning time needed, defer or restructure ego reinforcement because of shared involvement, and generally be prepared to be more patient because of the more gradual nature of change.

OUTWARD BOUND tried a group reconnaissance in April, 1975, with four youth leaders from Denver. All were interested in using Pawnee National Grasslands as a program area for youth groups. I was the only person who had been to this northeastern Colorado area. Originally I had planned to facilitate the 4 day trip in a traditional manner but soon realized that I didn't know enough about the area. Since a major objective of the workshop was to transfer how this area might be used with youth groups, involvement of the individuals in a team reconnaissance seemed logical.

Not only did the workshop members respond well to involvement in preplanning but they have opted since to help write a resource guide to the Grasslands. I'll list the steps we followed in running the workshop and include some of our planning notes.

1. Advanced reconnaissance. I visited the area, talked to the ranger, picked up maps.
2. Total Group Preplanning meeting: Brainstorming on potential uses of the Grasslands, arriving at mutual goals for the workshop, division of logistical, transportation, and program responsibilities among all five team members, map reconnaissance of program sites and program plan developed.
3. Four day reconnaissance at Pawnee National Grasslands: visitation of four major sites. Contact with ranger, continual brainstorming sessions on use of area with kids, experiencing program activities.

4. Debriefing and future planning session, last activity of trip: collection of information and ideas, decision to develop Grasslands resource guide, outline of resource guide, division of labor on writing the guide.

5. Resource Guide development meeting: Voluntary meeting of all but one participant, information shared, guide outline revised, materials given to editor for compilation.

6. Resource Guide draft meeting: final check of guide draft, corrections, additions, the guide goes to press. Final formal meeting.

Grasslands Preplanning Meeting: (Prior to the on site visit)

Preparation Responsibilities Responsibilities--Agreed to on a consensus basis.

Jim	Map and Compass use 1st Aid Plains Literature Liaison with Rangers Logistical coordination
John	Solar Still Orienteering Transportation
Don	Astronomy Indian history
Denny	Environmental -Flora and Fauna -Geology
Oli	Anthropology Group dynamics -awareness -team building Perception activities

TENTATIVE RESOURCE GUIDE OUTLINE: Developed at Post Trip Meetings
Based on group consensus.

I. Introduction- How it came together, focus on purpose of Guide-1st step

II. Area description John/Denny/Jim
- -Physical
- -Geographical
- -Sensory
- -Specific sites

III. History
- -Oli/Don
- -Red (map)
- -White-towns etc.
- -Current

IV. Ecological- Denny/Jim
- -Weather
- -Geology
- -Plant
- -Animal/Bird
- -Soil

V. Programming-Don/John/Jim
- A. Forest Service Regs
  - Preplanning and follow-up concept
  - Goals and OBI
- B. Sample
- C. Equipment

VI. References-Jim/Denny
- Reference Breakdown
- -History
- Env.
- Skills

PROJECT CENTER PROGRAM PLANNING SHEET

~~Student~~_____ COBS STAFF: PARTICIPATING ORG. STAFF:

Program Title_____

Participating Organization:

Location:_____

Dates:_____

Director:_____

EMERGENCY CONTACTS:

1._____

Name Address Phone

2._____

RATIONALE

Primary Goal:_____

Specific Objectives:_____

Evaluation:_____

Approved by_____

(Joseph J. Nold)

ADMINISTRATION

Location of Program:_____

Activities:_____

(Course Outline Attached)

COBS Insurance_____(medicals and student list attached)

Own Insurance_____(written details attached)

LOGISTICS

Equipment (See attached)

Vehicles:_____

Food:_____

Facilities:_____

FOREST SERVICE PERMIT

Area_____

Dates_____

No. Students/Staff_____

EMERGENCY PROCEDURE

Emergency contacts (name, address, phone):

a. Field contacts (how can you be reached?)_____

b. Emergency contacts in event of accident (sheriff, forest service, etc.)

Emergency Plan:

a. Alert Procedures_____

b. First Aid Equipment_____

PROJECT CENTER PROGRAM PLANNING SHEET (cont'd)

c. Method of field evacuation_____

_____

d. Transportation to medical aid_____

e. Hospitals, doctors, local search and rescue groups_____

_____

_____

(Program Director's Signature)